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SUBJECT: JAPANESE MORNING PRESS HIGHLIGHTS 01/29/08

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2) EDITORIALS

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3) Prime Minister's Official Residence (Kantei)

Prime Minister's schedule, January 28

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)

January 29, 2008

07:43

Met Deputy Chief Cabinet Secretary Ono at the Kantei.

09:00

Attended a Lower House Budget Committee meeting.

12:12

Met former Chief Cabinet Secretary Yosano at the Kantei.

13:00

Attended the Lower House Budget Committee meeting.

17:47

Met new NHK Chairman Shigeo Fukuchi at the Kantei.

18:07

Returned to his official residence.

4) Expiration of provisional gas tax rate to be avoided: Ruling camp

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to submit stop-gap bill allowing two-month extension

MAINICHI (Top Play) (Lead para.)

January 29, 2008

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and the New Komeito yesterday agreed on a plan to submit a stopgap bill to extend by two months the provisional tax rate imposed on the gasoline tax, which is due to expire at the end of March. The ruling parties will submit it to the Diet today to have it obtain its approval before the end of January. Even if the opposition camp-controlled Upper House votes it down, it will hold a second vote in the Lower House to have it enacted. The provisional gasoline tax rate, the central issue of the current Diet session, will now likely be maintained for some time after April. The opposition bloc, such as the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ), is fiercely opposing the ruling camp's move. They are determined to boycott Diet deliberations.

5) Opposition camp determined to boycott Diet deliberations

MAINICHI (Page 1) (Full)

January 29, 2008

After talks with the ruling parties, leaders of the Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto), including President Ichiro Ozawa, conferred on the gas tax issue. As a party policy, participants confirmed that it cannot give assurance for holding a vote on tax reform-related bills and opposes the ruling camp-sponsored stopgap gas tax bill. Regarding Diet deliberations on the fiscal 2007 supplementary budget bill at the Lower House Budget Committee today, one DPJ leader said, "As soon as the ruling parties submit the stopgap bill to the Diet, we will abstain from deliberations."

6) Verbal jabs between DPJ's Kan and cabinet ministers over use of revenues for road construction

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Slightly abridged)

January 29, 2008

The House of Representatives Budget Committee held interpellations yesterday when tensions rose between the ruling and opposition parties over a stopgap bill to maintain the current provisional rates for gasoline and other road-related taxes (for two months). In a bid to gain the upper hand, Naoto Kan, deputy president of the main opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto), relentlessly pursued the issue of tax revenues for road projects. In place of Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda, who has called on the opposition camp for cooperation, veteran cabinet ministers from the government's side launched counterattacks.

Kan stressed:

"Revenues earmarked for road construction are huge vested interests

for the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, and Transport, and they have been split by certain lawmakers with vested interests in road construction."

He made Oboro Bridge the target of his criticism. The bridge is located in the city of Yame, Fukuoka Prefecture, from which Makoto Koga, chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) Election Committee, was elected to the House of Representatives.

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Kan visited the city on Jan. 26 to see the bridge. Kan pointed out that although as much as 6.1 billion yen in tax money was spent for the construction of the bridge, which is called by local residents "Makoto Bridge" in tribute to Makoto Koga, just a few vehicles per hour use it. He put pressure on Land, Infrastructure and Transport Minister Tetsuzo Fuyushiba, saying: "It seems to me that places from which influential Diet members hail are given preferential treatment. Why don't you stop things that invite suspicions?"

Fuyushiba then reacted strongly:

"City roads, including bridges, are used by regional residents for commuting. The bridge assumes a key role as a 'lifeline road' to Kurume City, where there is an emergency hospital. I have received letters handwritten by heads of municipalities calling for maintain the tax revenues for road projects."

Kan responded:

"The ministry's approach of enlisting the heads of local governments as proxies is against the spirit of decentralization of power. All the heads of municipalities have approved the government's policy because they believe that if they are placed on a ministry blacklist, they won't be able to get subsidies from the government."

Representing the government, Finance Minister Fukushiro Nukaga and Internal Affairs and Communications Minister Hiroya Masuda replied to questions by Kan. However, they made replies that gave the impression that they were just making excuses. Therefore, Kan appeared to have won the battle through his provocative questions.

The opposition camp negatively reacted to the ruling coalition's idea of submitting the stopgap bill. Prime Minister Fukuda, however, remained on the sidelines.

7) DPJ determined to put up do-or-die resistance, including boycott, to make public appeal; But lowering gasoline price in April almost impossible, and DPJ needs to reformulate its strategy

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Excerpts)  
January 29, 2008

The major opposition Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ or Minshuto) reacted fiercely yesterday to the ruling bloc's notification that it would submit to the Diet a stopgap bill extending the provisional tax rate on gasoline until the end of May. The DPJ plans to make a public appeal by playing up the ruling bloc's highhandedness, while putting up do-or-die resistance, including physical resistance. Given the difficulty to lower gasoline prices starting in April, the DPJ needs to revamp its strategy.

DPJ President Ichiro Ozawa, Secretary General Yukio Hatoyama and other party executives discussed future measures at party headquarters. As a result, they agreed to continue demanding the abolition of the provisional tax rates to the last, saying that (submitting a stopgap bill) is an act of ignoring the Diet by suppressing deliberations.

Hatoyama said to reporters: "(Once a stopgap bill is presented), the situation would not allow us to respond to a call for deliberations so easily." He even pointed to the party's readiness to resort to

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boycotting deliberations, a strategy sealed off until recently.

At the same time, the DPJ is planning to make a public appeal by contending that the ruling camp has blocked the gasoline price from dropping by taking such a makeshift step. There is public expectation that the gasoline price will decline 25 yen per liter starting in April after the provisional tax rate expires. The DPJ thinks public anger toward the ruling bloc can be amplified with the right approach.

In order to play up the party's commitment to reducing the gasoline price, the DPJ is also studying such steps as allowing the House of Councillors to revise the Special Taxation Measures Law to exclude the provisional tax rate portion from it and submitting a counterproposal.

Some DPJ executives are hopeful that a stopgap bill will turn into a favorable wind for the largest opposition party.

At the same time, blocking the enactment in the current fiscal year of a bill amending the Special Taxation Measures Law would also end up sealing off the strategy of lowering the gasoline price.

8) Provisional tax rate extension bill certain to affect Diet timetable; Some committee sessions might stall

YOMIURI (Page 4) (Excerpts)  
January 29, 2008

The Liberal Democratic Party and New Komeito will submit today to the House of Representatives a bill to maintain the current provisional tax rate on gasoline and other taxes for two months beyond their expiration. Dark clouds are hanging over the planned stopgap bill in the Diet, which has just begun deliberating on the fiscal 2007 supplementary budget.

Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda attended yesterday's Lower House Budget Committee session, in which he highlighted the need to maintain the provisional tax rates by introducing the fact that the gasoline tax rates in European countries are higher than that in Japan out of consideration for the environment. Fukuda said: "The situation is such that European countries cannot help but ask, 'What is Japan's measure for the environment?'"

In response, Democratic Party of Japan Deputy President Kan said, "Priority is given only to areas with influential road-policy specialists," while showing pictures of a bridge constructed in LDP Election Committee Chairman Makoto Koga's constituency. He also explained the DPJ's call for abolishing the provisional tax rates.

The fierce battle between the ruling and opposition camp, both focused on public opinion, made it clear that the question of provisional tax rates is the biggest bone of contention in the current Diet session.

Regarding the supplementary budget bill, the ruling and opposition camps reached an agreement last weekend on: (1) taking a vote on it in a Jan. 29 Lower House plenary session and sending it to the Upper House, (2) an explanation on it at a Jan. 29 Upper House Budget Committee session and holding question-and-answer sessions starting on Jan. 30. The DPJ plans to oppose the supplementary budget. However, regarding other budget-related bills, such as a bill

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amending the local tax grants law, the DPJ held talks with the ruling bloc and reached a broad agreement on Jan. 28 out of consideration for possible ramifications on local governments. Such a reconciliatory mood is certain to change with the presentation to the Diet of a bill extending the expirations of three tax-related laws.

Against the ruling bloc's move to submit a bill extending the expirations, the DPJ seems determined to even boycott deliberations on other bills. In the DPJ-controlled Upper House, no specific date might be determined for starting deliberations on the supplementary

budget bill. Such a development is certain to take a toll on the fiscal 2008 budget deliberation timetable as well. Some ruling and opposition camp members have also begun speculating that the matter would spill over and cause confusion in the appointment of the new Bank of Japan governor, to be presented to the Diet by the government in early February.

9) Membership of China, India in G8 likely to be on agenda, but Japan worried about losing its presence

NIKKEI (Page 2) (Full)  
January 29, 2008

The question of whether to admit China and India into the Group of Eight (G8) has now cropped up as a matter for discussion in the upcoming G8 Summit (G8 Toyako Summit). France has indicated its intention to suggest granting them admission to the G8, and Britain is showing signs of coming around to France's proposal. If their accession to the G8 is allowed, Japan will lose its status as the only Asian country in the G8. As the host nation of the summit, Japan is likely to face difficulties in steering it well.

The proponent of expanding the G8 is French President Sarkozy. He visited India late this month and adopted a joint statement saying that the membership of the current G8 should be expanded into a group of 13, including India. British Prime Minister Brown, as well, conveyed his backing to the expansion of the G8 when he visited India during this month.

The Japanese government is watching how France and Britain will move, but it is worried. An official from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) pointed out: "Assuming that China and India are admitted to the G8 sometime in the future, France and Britain may calculate that it would be a wise policy for them to lead this change." This official expressed concern that France and Britain, motivated by their desire to do China and India a favor, may be trying to spark debate about their membership of the G8 at the upcoming Toyako Summit.

The Japanese government, which wants to produce tangible results in dealing with climate change, basically has no objection to inviting two major emitter nations, China and India, to the upcoming Toyako Summit for discussion. But this is one thing, and whether to admit those two countries into the G8 as formal members is another.

One Japanese government official expressed this concern about Sarkozy's proposal: "If China and other countries are admitted into the G8 before Japan obtains a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), Japan's voice will be further weakened." Japan apparently would not oppose admitting some countries into the G8, but would like to delay this expansion until it becomes a UNSC

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permanent member.

The battle between Japan and France over the matter is already picking up momentum behind the scenes.

The "Sherpa" meeting for the G8 Toyako Summit was held in mid-January in Tokyo. Sarkozy's Sherpa emphasized in the session: "Last year, China, India, Brazil, Mexico, and South Africa were invited to the G8 Summit, but the time devoted for discussion with them was only about an hour. In this year's G8 Summit, we need to have a framework for in-depth discussion with them." An implicit message from this French Sherpa was that new members, such as China and India, were indispensable.

As the host nation of the G8 Toyako Summit, Japan is basically authorized to decide which subjects should be placed on agenda. The way Japan will take the proposal made by France and Britain for admitting China and India into the G8 is likely to affect whether the environmental issue, a centerpiece of this year's G8 Summit, will produce results.

10) Japan, U.S., Britain to jointly propose at G-7 meeting plan to create environment fund for developing countries

Japan, the United States, and Britain have started coordination to jointly propose at a meeting of Group of Seven (G-7) finance ministers and central bank governors in Tokyo on Feb. 9 a plan to establish an environment fund designed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, according to informed sources yesterday. The move is aimed at proliferating energy-conservation technology in developing countries. The concept on an environment fund mechanism, which was advocated by Prime Minister Yasuo Fukuda in the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (Davos Conference), is now likely to move forward.

The prime minister earlier expressed his willingness to create a fund to support measures to be taken by developing countries to protect the environment. At the upcoming G-7 meeting, Finance Minister Fukushiro Nukaga, who will serve as chair, is expected to propose setting up an environment fund into which other industrialized countries than the G-7 member countries will also contribute funds, besides Japan, the U.S., and Britain, all of whom have promoted their own plans. The three countries will ask the other members of the G-7 to offer cooperation for their joint concept. They hope the concept will be included in the joint statement to be issued in winding up the G-7 meeting.

The three countries aim at disseminating energy-conservation technology in emerging powerhouses, like China and India. They also plan to support developing countries' measures to deal with problems caused by climate change, such as sea-level rise. The proposed fund is likely to be managed by the World Bank.

The G-7 countries share the fear that climate change could stand in the way of an expansion of the global economy. In its previous session held last October, the joint statement inserted this wording: "The G-7 will explore the possibility of creating a fund designed to have technologies to generate clean energy come into wide use in developing countries."

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11) Fukuda reveals Japan's target of halving greenhouse gas emissions by 2050

In a meeting of the House of Representatives Budget Committee yesterday, Prime Minister Fukuda said: "Our nation will halve emissions by 2050. Emissions will peak out (and start to decline) in 20 years or 30 years." The prime minister revealed Japan's long-term target for cutting greenhouse gas emissions for the first time. The "Cool Earth" initiative, announced by the government last May as its basic policy to fight global warming, proposed a long-term goal of halving the total amount of greenhouse gases worldwide by 2050, but the government had stopped short of mentioning any specific target for Japan.

The prime minister said: "If other countries fail to attain the goal of halving emissions, Japan may have to make more efforts." He thus referred to the possibility that a higher target may be set for Japan. Environment Minister Kamoshita also said: "I think that 50 PERCENT is the minimum requirement."

Discussions have been conducted on a new international framework to contain global warming beyond the 2012 timeframe set under the Kyoto Protocol at the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and on other occasions.

Prior to the July Lake Toya Summit in Hokkaido, which Fukuda will chair, he apparently is aiming to play up his eagerness to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and display his leadership in international negotiations.

12) Record high of 90 countries to participate in TICAD

YOMIURI (Page 2) (Full)  
January 29, 2008

A record high of 90 countries, 77 international organizations and 12 individuals are expected to attend the fourth Tokyo International Conference on Africa Development (TICAD-4), which will be held in May in Yokohama. The government, having already sent out invitations, plans to ask leaders of African countries and international institutions to take part in the conference.

The countries invited are 52 African nations, excluding Somalia, the Group of Eight countries, Scandinavian countries, and China, which have provided aid to Africa. Cambodia, which has experience in rebuilding after conflict, and Vietnam, which is enthusiastic about cooperating with developing countries, are also expected to join the conference. The government is also asking former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan, Microsoft Chairman Bill Gates and Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, chairman of Grameen Bank, which extends loans to poor people in Bangladesh, to participate in the conference. A total of 89 countries and 47 international organizations took part in the TICAD-3 in 2003. The number of participants is expected to top those of the 2003 conference.

13) Chinese Communist Party leader to visit DPRK shortly to jump-start stalled six-party talks, may meet with Kim Jong Il

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TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 1) (Full)  
January 29, 2008

Yasunobu Kiuchi, Beijing

Wang Jiarui, head of the International Department of the Communist Party of China, will shortly travel to North Korea, sources well-versed in China-DPRK relations revealed yesterday. The official purpose seems to be talks with the Korean Workers' Party (KWP), but both sides are likely to have discussions on ending the stalemate in the six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue at a time when the talks have been stalled owing to North Korea's delay in declaring its nuclear programs.

This will be Wang's first visit to the DPRK since he went there in October 2005 accompanying President Hu Jintao. Wang is expected to meet with the KWP leadership. As a special envoy of Hu Jintao, Wang may convey a message to Kim Jong Il.

On the North Korean nuclear issue, the United States and other countries insist that (North Korea) has not provided an accurate declaration of its nuclear programs, while the North Koreans insist they have already provided a declaration to the U.S. Both sides' assertions have gotten nowhere.

Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei, who serves as the chair of the six-party talks, met with his North Korean counterpart in the six-party talks, Vice Foreign Minister Kim Gye Gwan, in Pyongyang in mid-December. No particular results were produced.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Christopher Hill, America's chief negotiator in the six-party talks, met with Wu and Wang in Beijing on Jan. 11. After the session, Hill implied to the reporters that their discussion focused on the issue of North Korea's declaration, which has been delayed.

In February 2007, Wang visited North Korea immediately after the North declared it possessed nuclear weapons and that it would indefinitely suspend its participation in the six-party talks. After meeting with Kim Jong Il, Wang elicited from Kim a positive attitude of returning to the six-party talks. That is why Wang's visit to North Korea this time is drawing attention as to whether it will move the now stalled nuclear issue forward.

14) Japan Coast Guard official onboard whaler

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)

January 29, 2008

A Japan Coast Guard (JCG) official is onboard the Nisshinmaru, Japan's lead ship in its research whaling fleet operating in the Southern Ocean. This is the second time for the JCG to place an official on a ship other than a JCG patrol ship outside Japan's territorial waters. The first case was in 1992. At that time, a JCG official was on the Akatsukimaru when it carried plutonium. Antiwhaling groups are boosting their protest activities, so the JCG's action this time is unusual.

The research whaling fleet left the port of Shimonoseki in Yamaguchi Prefecture on Nov. 18 last year. The JCG official embarked on a whaler that left port after the Nisshinmaru, and the official joined the lead ship in December.

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In February 2006, a foreign antiwhaling group carried out protest activities, with its members throwing bottles that contained chemicals at a Japanese whaler. Last fall, the Fisheries Agency, concerned about the escalation of protest activities, asked the JCG to place an official onboard.

The JCG official is tasked with videotaping protest activities and evacuating crewmen. The official is also authorized to arrest antiwhaling activists if and when they illegally board a Japanese whaler.

On Jan. 15, two members of Sea Shepherd, an antiwhaling group, boarded a Japanese research whaling ship. They were detained there. At that time, the JCG official was on another ship operating in a different area.

When the Akatsukimaru was on the plutonium sealift mission, a JCG special task force was onboard the ship. However, this fact was not revealed at the time.

15) Ishiba pushing own plan for permanent SDF dispatch law

TOKYO SHIMBUN (Page 2) (Full)  
January 29, 2008

Defense Minister Shigeru Ishiba is eager to create a permanent law allowing Japan to send the Self-Defense Forces for overseas missions whenever necessary. Ishiba is now pushing his own plan as a basis for discussions on the permanent legislation. His plan, however, steps into the area of reinterpreting the Constitution. Government officials and ruling party lawmakers are therefore showing a cool response.

In August 2006, the ruling Liberal Democratic Party's defense policy review subcommittee worked out a legislative measure for Japan's international peace cooperation as a draft bill for the permanent legislation. In those days, Ishiba presided over the subcommittee. This plan failed to get the LDP's approval and is now handled as a private plan of Ishiba and other subcommittee members.

Later on, the Diet debated on a now-enacted new antiterrorism special measures law. The Diet debate prompted calls for creating a permanent law. Ishiba then brought up his draft plan for the permanent legislation. "I have presented a basis for a permanent law," Ishiba said. "To begin with," he added, "the permanent law's system needs to obtain understanding." He also said: "This proposal has yet to be brought to fruition. That's attributable to my lack of effort." With this, he has begun working on the government and the LDP.

However, Ishiba's draft plan proposes easing the government's current guidelines for SDF personnel's use of weapons on overseas missions, suggesting the need for SDF troops to go to the help of foreign troops under attack and use weapons to defend them. In addition, the Ishiba plan also proposes allowing Japan to send SDF troops to a foreign country at its request, even if there is no resolution passed at the United Nations. To translate these proposals into action, the government will need to reinterpret the

Constitution, which prohibits Japan from participating in collective self-defense.

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New Komeito—the LDP's coalition partner—was cautious about the idea of creating a permanent law for SDF activities overseas, and the party has now begun to discuss the permanent legislation. However, New Komeito is strongly opposed to constitutional reinterpretation. The Ishiba plan's hurdle is too high for New Komeito to clear. "We should discuss the permanent legislation from scratch," one of New Komeito's lawmakers said. Ishiba calls himself an expert in the security realm. However, his 'self-confident work' is a far cry from being acceptable to the government and ruling parties.

16) MOFA probes affiliate over defense corruption

MAINICHI (Page 2) (Full)  
January 29, 2008

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs yesterday conducted an on-the-spot inspection of the Japan-U.S. Center for Peace and Cultural Exchange, an incorporated body under the Foreign Ministry's jurisdiction. On the center's board of directors is Naoki Akiyama, who was summoned to the House of Councillors Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee in connection with Vice Defense Minister Moriya's bribery case. The inspection was intended to check and see if the center was operated in an appropriate manner. The inspection was conducted in the presence of Akiyama. Officials from the Foreign Ministry's Public Diplomacy Department checked accounting and property management books and other files while interviewing Akiyama. The Foreign Ministry will scrutinize the inspection and will inform the center of points to be improved, if any.

SCHIEFFER